**A Portrait of Julius Caesar**

**W**hen Julius Caesar was born in the year 100 BC, Rome was a republic. When he died fifty-six years later, Rome was a dictatorship on its way to becoming an empire. Julius Caesar was in large part responsible for this transition.

Although born into a patrician family and therefore assured of elite status in Roman society, his family was at the lower rung of the social ladder without influence and prestige. Caesar's accomplishments in later life were a result of his own unbridled ambition, talent and a little luck.

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| http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/images/caesar31.jpg Julius Caesar |

He became a spell-binding orator able to sway others to his will through the force of his words. He was an accomplished writer who eloquently advertised his own achievements. He was a brilliant military leader, who over nine years of continuous fighting conquered Gaul adding modern-day France, parts of Switzerland and the Low Countries to Rome's possessions. With the strength of his victorious legion backing him up, Julius Caesar marched on the city of Rome and grabbed the reins of power. Julius Caesar was a man who changed history.

*The Roman historian Suetonius provides us with some insight into the character and personality of Julius Caesar:*

"He was tall, of a fair complexion, round limbed, rather full faced, with eyes black and piercing; he enjoyed excellent health except toward the close of his life when he was subject to sudden fainting fits and disturbances in his sleep. He was likewise twice seized with the 'falling sickness,' while engaged in active service.

He was extremely nice in the care of his person, and kept the hair of his head closely cut and had his face smoothly shaved. His baldness gave him much uneasiness, having often found himself on that score exposed to the jibes of his enemies. He used therefore to brush forward the hair from the crown of his head, and of all the honors conferred on him by the Senate and People, there was none which he either accepted or used with greater pleasure than the right of wearing constantly a laurel crown.

He was a notable lady's man, and indulged in many intrigues; he was especially intimate with Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus. He was perfect in the use of arms, an accomplished rider, and able to endure fatigue beyond all belief. On a march he used to go at the head of his troops, sometimes on horseback, but oftener on foot, with his head bare in all kinds of weather. He would travel post in a light carriage without baggage, at the rate of one hundred miles per day; and if he was stopped by floods in the rivers, he swam across, or floated on skins inflated in the wind, so that he often anticipated the tidings of his movements.

**Caesar** **Crosses the Rubicon, 49 BC**

The crossing of a small stream in northern Italy became one of ancient history's most pivotal events. From it sprang the Roman Empire and the genesis of modern European culture.

Born with unbridled political ambition and unsurpassed oratory skills, Julius Caesar manipulated his way to the

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| http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/images/caesar1.jpg |
| Roman Legionary |

position of consul of Rome in 59 BC. After his year of service he was named governor of Gaul where he amassed a personal fortune and exhibited his outstanding military skill in subduing the native Celtic and Germanic tribes. Caesar's popularity with the people soared, presenting a threat to the power of the Senate and to Pompey, who held power in Rome. Accordingly, the Senate called upon Caesar to resign his command and disband his army or risk being declared an "Enemy of the State". Pompey was entrusted with enforcing this edict - the foundation for civil war was laid.

It was January 49 BC, Caesar was staying in the northern Italian city of Ravenna and he had a decision to make. Either he acquiesced to the Senate's command or he moved southward to confront Pompey and plunge the Roman Republic into a bloody civil war. An ancient Roman law forbade any general from crossing the Rubicon River and entering Italy proper with a standing army. To do so was treason. This tiny stream would reveal Caesar's intentions and mark the point of no return.

**The Die is Cast**

Coming up with his troops on the banks of the Rubicon, which was the frontier of his province, he halted for a while, and revolving in his mind the importance of the step he meditated, he turned to those about him, saying: 'Still we can retreat! But once let us pass this little bridge, - and nothing is left but to fight it out with arms!' Even as he hesitated this incident occurred. A man of strikingly noble mien and graceful aspect appeared close at hand, and played upon a pipe. To hear him not merely some shepherds, but soldiers too came flocking from their posts, and amongst them some trumpeters. He snatched a trumpet from one of them and ran to the river with it; then sounding the "Advance!" with a piercing blast he crossed to the other side. At this Caesar cried out, 'Let us go where the omens of the Gods and the crimes of our enemies summon us! THE DIE IS NOW CAST!' (Alea iacta est!)

**Dictator for Life**

**I**n January of 49 BC, Julius Caesar led his army across the Rubicon River in Northern Italy (see [***Caesar Crosses the Rubicon, 49 BC***](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/caesar.htm)) and plunged the Roman Republic into civil war. Caesar's rival, Pompey, fled to Greece. Within three months Caesar controlled the entire Italian peninsula and in Spain had defeated the legions loyal to Pompey.

Caesar now pursued Pompey to Greece. Although outnumbered, Caesar crushed the forces of his enemy but not before Pompey escaped to Egypt. Following Pompey to Egypt, Caesar was presented with his rival's severed head as a token of friendship. Before leaving the region, Caesar established Cleopatra as his surrogate ruler of Egypt. Caesar defeated his remaining rivals in North Africa in 47 BC and returned to Rome with his authority firmly established.

Caesar continued to consolidate his power and in February 44 BC, he declared himself dictator for life. This act, along with his continual effort to adorn himself with the trappings of power, turned many in the Senate against him. Sixty members of the Senate concluded that the only resolution to the problem was to assassinate Caesar.

**The Assassination of** **Julius Caesar, 44 BC**

**The Plan:**

"The conspirators never met openly, but they assembled a few at a time in each others' homes. There were many discussions and proposals, as might be expected, while they investigated how and where to execute their design. …the majority opinion favored killing him while he sat in the Senate, where he would be by himself since non-Senators would not be admitted, and where the many conspirators could hide their daggers beneath their togas. This plan won the day."

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**Bad Omens and Brutus Persuades Caesar to Ignore his Apprehensions:**

"...his friends were alarmed at certain rumors and tried to stop him going to the Senate-house, as did his doctors, for he was suffering from one of his occasional dizzy spells. His wife, Calpurnia, especially, who was frightened by some visions in her dreams, clung to him and said that she would not let him go out that day. But Brutus, one of the conspirators who was then thought of as a firm friend, came up and said, 'What is this, Caesar? Are you a man to pay attention to a woman's dreams and the idle gossip of stupid men, and to insult the Senate by not going out, although it has honored you and has been specially summoned by you? But listen to me, cast aside the forebodings of all these people, and come. The Senate has been in session waiting for you since early this morning.' This swayed Caesar and he left."

Caesar's friends asked him to put off the meeting of the Senate for that day because of what the priests had said, and he agreed to do this. But some attendants came up, calling him and saying that the Senate was full. He glanced at his friends, but Brutus approached him again and said, 'Come, good sir, pay no attention to the babblings of these men, and do not postpone what Caesar and his mighty power has seen fit to arrange. Make your own courage your favorable omen.' He convinced Caesar with these words, took him by the right hand, and led him to the Senate which was quite near. Caesar followed in silence."

**The Attack:**

"The Senate rose in respect for his position when they saw him entering. Those who were to have part in the plot stood near him. Right next to him went Tillius Cimber, whose brother had been exiled by Caesar. Under pretext of a humble request on behalf of this brother, Cimber approached and grasped the mantle of his toga, seeming to want to make a more positive move with his hands upon Caesar. Caesar wanted to get up and use his hands, but was prevented by Cimber and became exceedingly annoyed.

That was the moment for the men to set to work. All quickly unsheathed their daggers and rushed at him. First Servilius Casca struck him with the point of the blade on the left shoulder a little above the collar-bone. He had been aiming for that, but in the excitement he missed. Caesar rose to defend himself, and in the uproar Casca shouted out in Greek to his brother. The latter heard him and drove his sword into the ribs. After a moment, Cassius made a slash at his face, and Decimus Brutus pierced him in the side. While Cassius Longinus was trying to give him another blow he missed and struck Marcus Brutus on the hand. Minucius also hit out at Caesar and hit Rubrius in the thigh. They were just like men doing battle against him.

Under the mass of wounds, he fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. Everyone wanted to seem to have had some part in the murder, and there was not one of them who failed to strike his body as it lay there, until, wounded thirty-five times, he breathed his last. "